

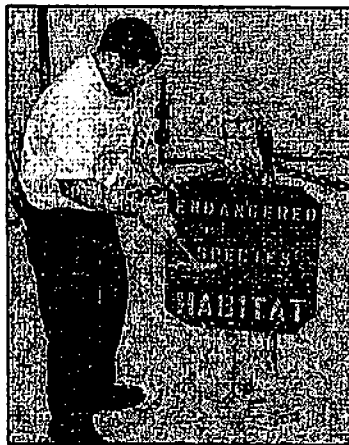
Beach Access Limited; Plovers Move in

By RAY HAINER

Over-sand access to Duxbury Beach will be limited this summer due to the expanding habitat of the piping plover, a threatened species protected by federal law.

The first crossover was closed Friday because of plover nests nearby, and beachgoers will now be asked to leave the second crossover by 8 p.m., because no monitors are on duty to watch over the birds. Dogs are also prohibited from entering the endangered species area.

"I don't want to ruin it for everybody," said Jake Emerson, endangered species officer for the Duxbury harbor master's office, indicating that his hands were tied by



Endangered species officer Jake Emerson closed the first beach crossover Friday.

both state and federal environmental laws. "Where the birds are I have to close down. And it just so happens that they're right by the first crossover."

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In addition to the closing of the crossovers, Harbormaster Don Beers cautions beachgoers that they can expect delays and crowding at the beach because of the plovers.

Thirteen nests have been located so far by assistant harbormasters and Audubon Society workers, who walk up and down the beach in search of the small, well-camouflaged eggs. And the protected areas containing the nests are growing, says Emerson.

It is unclear when, if at all, the plovers will move on and the first crossover will be reopened. The areas currently closed off will remain closed until the chicks 'fledge,' or fly. According to Emerson, this takes about 35 days, but there is no telling whether more birds will come and nest in the area. The area will be closed, said Emerson, "Until the birds determine when they leave."

Joe Conway, chairman of the Duxbury Beach Committee predicts that the closing of the first crossing is a "sign of things to come if special interest groups continue to overshadow" the town and local organizations. Conway added that it costs money to provide monitors and fencing for the plovers.

"Some organizations have an interest in just the birds," Conway said, "while the town and [Beach Reservation, Inc.] try to maintain a balance between the beach as a habitat for endangered species, and the beach as a recreational resource."

Fellow Beach Committee member Susanna Sheehan also noted the difficulty in maintaining this balance, and said that "the town and Reservation have to walk a tightrope to protect the birds and keep the beach open."

Andrea Jones, the Mass Audubon Society's coastal waterbird program director, said that the Massachusetts

plover population currently numbers about 430 pairs, and that the population would surely wither if the species weren't protected. The piping plover is designated as a threatened species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"The plovers should not be listed as threatened. There's 5000-plus of them," said Duxbury Beach Reservation Trustee Jason Wolfson. "The Audubon wants the beach to be a wildlife refuge."

Jones clarified that the Audubon Society was not directly involved in any decisions to close the beach, and characterized their role in Duxbury as that of "consult-

ant."

"We're just helping the town," Jones explained. "The town and harbormaster are responsible for closing the beach based on state and federal guidelines." The harbormaster and assistant harbormasters are ultimately responsible for enforcing the state and federal laws, and, Jones noted, are doing "an excellent job" doing so.

Al Vautrineau, vice-president of the Duxbury Beach Reservation and co-chairman of the Beach Technical committee, pointed out that the charter for the Duxbury Beach Reservation "charges us with protecting the environment and promoting conservation, as well as providing access for people. We have a legal obligation to protect the birds as best we can."

He also observed that Duxbury's beach road was one of only two roads in Massachusetts where vehicles are allowed to drive within 100 yards of plover nests. "We are fortunate to have the beach open at all," he said.

The plovers have plenty of worries even without the threat of human disturbance. Seagulls prey on plovers, and the coyotes that have been seen roaming the beach recently had puppies, according to Emerson.

Duxbury Beach "is an evolutionary piece of land," explained Emerson. "It's constantly changing." And the presence of the plovers, Emerson points out, is just like any other environmental event that affects the beach.

Except in this case, rather than a big storm closing a crossover, it happens to be little birds.

"People have to understand that the beach is a habitat, that they're not the only ones on the beach," Emerson said.

Although Emerson is worried about how residents will react to the plovers' encroachment on their territory, he advises beachgoers to be patient with the birds, and with the new rules. "We should be able to coexist."



In addition to the beach restrictions several "plover pens" have been constructed to protect the threatened species whose eggs are quite small and easily missed.